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THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

(MARK, CHAP. 13)

REV. ELIJAH A. HANLEY, D.D.

Providence, R. I.

Jesus and his disciples were standing in the presence of architectural splendor which embodied the history and ideals of the nation. He saw the shadow of dark calamity sweep over the land, leaving desolation in its path and working ruin to city and temple. But he knew that his gospel would be preached to all nations and his cause move on to glorious triumph. The disciples were to take heed unto themselves. They must not be terrified or diverted from their true mission. Stepping aside from the physical calamity, they were to look steadfastly for the triumph of the Kingdom, giving an unflinching testimony and knowing that the divine spirit would operate through them.

THE EVENT

Let us go forward exactly forty years from the date of this utterance and look upon Jerusalem in April of that fatal year of 70 A. D. Jesus has been put to death but still lives. The disciples have been cruelly persecuted, first by the temple authorities and then by the powers of Rome. Nero has given his atrocities to history, Peter and Paul suffering martyrdom. It is just before the Passover and the city is full of pilgrims. But the gates are closed, for war is in the land. Over the hills comes the army of Titus and on the Mount of Olives where Jesus had sat, the Tenth legion is making its camp.

Four years before the Jews had rebelled. Vespasian swiftly subdued Galilee and southern Judea, then waited while conflicting parties butchered each other in Jerusalem. Proceeding at last to attack the city, he was hailed emperor and left the grim work to his son Titus. About this time, it is said, all Christians left the city. Titus stood not on his orders. After a terrible siege lasting five months, the city was taken and destroyed in September, A. D. 70.

ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Thus we see the removal of an institution which withstood the march of progress. The temple had a noble history, but history is a dangerous thing; it may look only to the past and forget that God is marching on. The temple stood face to face with a new epoch which it could neither see nor serve. Accordingly it left itself no alternative.

Little can we appreciate the gloom with which men saw home, nation, temple disappear under an awful misfortune. Yet light breaks from another source and the cause of righteousness does not lapse. From under the shadow of that temple faith went forth to the conquest of the world. In its onward march the truth of Christ swung free from institutional Judaism just as in the Reformation faith disengaged itself from Roman ecclesiasticism or, indeed, as at the present day, the gospel is being freed from all sectarian limitations.

The event has suggested a world catastrophe in which the whole natural order shall finally pass away. What will be the end of this material world, we may leave to speculative thought—but we can well see through the long vistas of history what will endure. The temple passes, the nation falls, perhaps the church also shall pass away, but the kingdom of Christ shall move on forever.

We see here also the peril of neglected opportunity. The people, left unspiritual, finally broke into political revolt that brought destruction. Only one thing could have saved them—the conception of their mission taught by Jesus. Could he have had his way, the history of the Jewish people would, no doubt, have been very different. And if today we give the gospel to all classes, such a terrible catastrophe may be avoided; but if the disciples of Jesus hold aloof from the vast social forces now gathering among the industrial classes of our western civilization by the ever-increasing flood of immigration, the time may come when untaught human madness will bring on another destruction of the temple, another French Revolution.

Rejoice that we live in an age which is creative, with our faces toward the rising sun; rejoice that our social institutions are plastic and every man may have his part in creating the nation, the race, the church, that are still to be; but rejoice most that through the ages one increasing purpose runs and that our true citizenship is in a Kingdom which shall endure forever.